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Soviet Views on a Possible Summit MeetingSummary

Certain trends in Soviet policy during the final weeks of Andropov's tenure, and Chernenko's seeming interest in greater efforts to improve bilateral relations, suggest that the Soviets might be willing to consider a proposal for a summit meeting. Nonetheless, domestic power considerations would affect the internal debate on the idea, and some Soviet leaders would be skeptical about the value of a summit at this time. The Politburo probably would agree only if confident that it would bring progress on one or more of the issues of concern to Moscow--INF, limiting weapons in outer space, START, MBFR, chemical warfare, or regional issues, particularly the Middle East.

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Soviet Probes on Summit Prospects

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] Strategic/Internal Branch, Current Support Division, Office of Soviet Analysis, and has not been coordinated outside that office. Questions and comments should be addressed to the Chief, Current Support Division, [redacted]

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2. Soviet public statements on bilateral relations during this period remained generally negative and avoided any mention of the possibility of a summit. Statements consistent with the idea occasionally appeared, however, such as a remark by a Moscow television commentator on 25 December that the USSR was "ready to deal with any US President." Responding to President Reagan's speech of 16 January, General Secretary Andropov said a week later that the Soviets needed no convincing as to the usefulness of dialogue and that there were possibilities for "serious discussion" of a number of problems. Along with not wishing to appear less willing to be conciliatory than the President, Andropov may have adopted his more moderate tone in part out of concern that Moscow's militant statements during the fall of 1983 had aroused excessive alarm among the Soviet public.

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3. The accession of Konstantin Chernenko as General Secretary has given additional impetus to the hints of interest in reestablishing a dialogue that had begun to appear in the final weeks of Andropov's tenure, and may have increased Moscow's willingness to consider the idea of a summit. The new leader has the reputation of having supported Brezhnev's policy of improving relations with the US, which placed a high value on personal diplomacy. Chernenko's accession speech professed interest in settling international problems through "serious, equal and constructive talks," and his speech at Andropov's funeral reiterated readiness for "talks on the basis of equality and equal security." Chernenko's supporters, at least, might favor a summit as a way of enhancing the new leader's stature as a world statesman both at home and abroad.

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6. Despite the desire to get a dialogue going again and Chernenko's apparent inclination to seek improved relations, a proposal to hold a summit meeting this year almost certainly would arouse intense debate in Moscow. Aside from the pros and cons of any substantive initiative accompanying the proposal, the Soviets would consider carefully its possible impact on the US political scene, and individual Soviet leaders would be keenly aware of its implications for Chernenko's personal status. West European support for the idea would also enter into Soviet deliberations, as Moscow continues its efforts to convince public opinion in the NATO countries of its good faith in seeking to reduce international tensions.

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Potential Sources of Opposition

7. One view in Moscow, evident in a number of commentaries [redacted] since last September, holds that there is no possibility of reaching an agreement with the present US administration on major issues such as arms control. Moreover, [redacted] during the final months of Andropov's regime indicated that the Soviets were determined to do nothing to enhance the administration's prospects for being reelected, although most Soviets appear to believe that those prospects are good whatever Moscow does. Those holding such views would be likely to argue against the idea of a summit, unless they could be convinced that an agreement could be reached that would address some of Moscow's concerns. Without the prospect of positive results, they would likely assert that a summit would be primarily a US propaganda show staged to help the President get reelected. A Japanese newspaper reports that an editor of Novosti voiced these views in expressing doubt last Friday that a summit would occur this year.

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8. It is also possible that some members of the Soviet leadership would be cool toward a move that enhanced Chernenko's status, preferring that his personal authority continue to be limited by a collegial relationship. There appears, however, to be a tendency in Moscow to seek to establish Chernenko's authority as quickly as possible. Ogarkov, for example, has already referred to him as Chairman of the Defense Council.

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9. It is likely that the two Politburo members most influential in foreign policy decisions, Foreign Minister Gromyko and Defense Minister Ustinov, would at least be skeptical about the idea of an early summit, and might oppose it. In an "interview" with TASS last June, Gromyko acknowledged that a summit could produce major results under proper conditions, but he asserted that these were lacking on the US side. He noted, however, that things would look different if there were signs of US readiness to conduct relations "in a serious and constructive manner." He has not indicated that he has seen such signs yet. In his speech last month to the Conference on Disarmament in Europe at Stockholm, Gromyko said that US statements of readiness to talk while continuing to deploy missiles were "verbal camouflage," and that the USSR will not engage in talks that serve as a "cover for militarist plans." In a speech on 27 February, Gromyko repeated Andropov's implied condition that the new US missiles must be withdrawn from Europe in order for INF talks to resume.

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10. Ustinov has not directly addressed the idea of a summit, but in an article in Pravda as recently as 23 February, he was critical of US intentions in a manner that suggests he would be highly skeptical of a summit's

advisability. His Armed Forces Day address--traditionally an occasion for tough rhetoric--was not as forthcoming about the desire for dialogue as Chernenko had been or, indeed, as Ustinov himself had been on a similar occasion a year earlier. He accused the US administration of seeking to deal with the USSR from a position of "strength, threats, and pressure." [redacted]

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Outlook

11. The existence of a strongly pessimistic strain in Soviet thinking about relations with the US, and the possible coolness of Gromyko and Ustinov to the idea of a summit, do not mean that the Soviets would necessarily reject such a proposal. It is likely, however, that Moscow would agree only if confident that it would yield some tangible benefit. Judging from public and private statements, the following issues are those on which the prospect of progress would seem most likely to lead the Soviet leadership seriously to consider a summit meeting:

- The Soviets accord highest priority by far to securing US agreement to a formula for resuming the INF talks that would ensure that UK and French systems are accounted for in some forum, and freeze further deployments by either side while negotiations continue.
- Other arms control issues are of lower priority to Moscow, for now at least. Depending, however, on how the Soviets weight the potential political impact, both domestically and in the US, the prospect of movement on one or more of these issues might tip the balance in favor of a summit. They include limitation of weapons in outer space, START, MBFR, and chemical warfare.
- The Soviets have also expressed interest in serious bilateral talks--though not necessarily a summit--on critical regional conflicts in which both sides have an interest in avoiding confrontation, most notably the Middle East. [redacted]

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